



U. S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
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CHECKING UP THE MIGRATION OF BIRDS

The desire to learn what became of birds that flew south with the approach of cold weather led Audubon -- the great American naturalist -- to place silver threads about the legs of a brood of phoebes. The following spring he was rewarded by having two of the birds return to nest near the haunts where they learned to fly.

This occurred early in the nineteenth century, and was the first known case in America of bird banding. Since that time this means of securing information on the movements and life history of migratory birds has been used by many societies, and every fall thousands of birds fly south bearing a narrow ring, stamped with a number, about one of its legs.

So valuable is this work, especially with game and insectivorous species of birds, that in 1920 the United States Department of Agriculture took over the experiments being conducted by the American Bird Banding Association, the society's work having outgrown its available resources. Since it is the returns from bird banding that furnish the data desired in this branch of research, it is of prime importance that the methods employed be improved and that the percentage of birds under observation be increased. To assist cooperators in this work, the department has published Department Circular 170, Instructions for Bird Banding, which is just available for distribution.

It is the plan of the Biological Survey of the department, which is supervising the bird-banding work, to advance this method of research along two principal lines: first, the banding of fledglings as formerly practiced; and second, the systematic trapping and banding of adult birds. As the banding of fledglings

has the advantage of affording valuable information on the ages of birds, the survey wishes to encourage these activities, but it desires to lay special emphasis on the added value of the systematic trapping of adults.

With the establishment of a well-connected chain of trapping stations throughout the United States and Canada, regular "returns" are confidently expected by department specialists with reports of retrapping birds that had been banded at the original and other stations. Data thus afforded are already indicating the exact lines of migration of individual birds, the speed of travel, and innumerable items of interest, many of which have a direct bearing upon the study of life histories and the administration of the Migratory Bird Treaty Act ^{which} with the department is charged.

The department issues bands of two types to cooperators in the work. One type is the split ring band for all small birds, and the other is the flat strip band that is adjustable for all large birds. For general land-bird trapping the so-called Government "sparrow trap" has been found the most satisfactory. The bulletin contains details of construction of this trap. It also discusses other methods of trapping, the operation of traps, handling and releasing birds, and filling out reports. Federal trapping permits for this work are required under the Migratory Bird Treaty Act. Applications for permits and requests for the bulletin should be addressed to the Bureau of Biological Survey, Department of Agriculture, Washington, D. C.